

FLOOR STATEMENT
RAHALL BISON AMENDMENT
FY '04 INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS
JULY 16, 2003

Mr. Chairman, today I am offering an amendment to halt the slaughter of Bison in Yellowstone National Park.

The Bison is a symbol of America. Like the monuments on our National Mall or the dome on this Capitol building, the Bison is an American icon. These magnificent beasts are woven into the fabric of our culture — not to mention being sewn *onto* the fabric of every uniform worn by an employee of the Department of the Interior.

After a century of wanton slaughter, we have a small herd in Yellowstone National Park—the last remaining example of the purebred, free-roaming Bison left in this country.

Is it any wonder then that the American public looks on in horror at footage of employees of the United States Department of the Interior participating in the slaughter of Yellowstone Bison?

The general public is under the impression that these animals are being sheltered and protected by the federal government, not rounded up and shot.

But the numbers tell the awful story: this year alone, the Interior Department participated in the slaughter of 244 Yellowstone Bison. On average over the last decade, 250 of these wild animals have either been shipped off to slaughter or shot on sight, each year.

And the obvious question is why. Why is the Department of the Interior murdering its beloved mascot? Should this picture be the new seal for the leading conservation agency in this country?

Instead of a bison standing tall and proud on the seal of the Interior Department, it is indeed dead, on its back, legs standing stiffly into the air.

The reason these bison are being slaughtered lies in the Department's decision to pander to a single State's deadly approach to wildlife management.

During the harsh winter months, Bison migrate out of Yellowstone National Park to lower elevations in a desperate attempt to avoid starving to death.

Once they leave the Park, they can come into contact with cattle grazing on public and private land and some of the Bison may carry a disease which can be dangerous to cows.

But here is the critical point: the transfer of this disease from Bison to cattle *has never happened in the wild. Never.*

Yet, one State, and only one which borders Yellowstone, insists that the only means to deal with the *theoretical possibility that it might* is to pursue an automatic death sentence for any Bison that steps one hoof over the invisible Park boundary.

Talk about using a sledge hammer to kill a flea. Under current policy, simply being a Bison in Montana is a capital crime, punishable by death.

Perhaps most shocking of all: most of the Bison are not even tested to see if they actually carry the disease before being sent to their deaths.

The truth is, this State is caught in a time warp. Despite the fact that we have entered a new millennium, this particular State is still pursuing wildlife management policies that were popular in the 1800's.

Moreover, this State has demanded, and the Interior Department has agreed, to *help* the State implement its 19th century approach to wildlife management by *helping* them shoot Bison.

And that must stop. The National Park Service is one of the foremost conservation agencies in the world; it should not be required to kill the wildlife they are sworn to protect.

If adopted, this amendment will prohibit the use of any funds in this bill to kill, or to assist others in killing, these magnificent animals.

This is a very narrow amendment. If Montana wants to continue to slaughter Bison as if we were still living in the Old West, this amendment will not stop them. However, the federal agencies funded in this bill, agencies with a conservation mandate, will not help them do the dirty work.

The federal conservation agencies funded in this bill will continue working within the existing Bison management plan to address the theoretical threat of disease through hazing and capture of Bison, through development of a vaccine for both cattle and Bison and through the use of other tools. But the tools they use will

no longer be lethal.

This is a very simple amendment. Members either support slaughtering Yellowstone Bison or they do not. We know the American people do not support the slaughter of this icon of America, just as they would not the Bald Eagle. There is no good reason for this killing and I urge my colleagues to adopt the Rahall amendment.